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How a Joss & Main style director transformed her own Charlestown Victorian

By day, she's got a dreamy job at the Boston-based home furnishings site. In her spare time, she's slowly redesigned her family's fixer-upper.

By Marni Elyse Katz, Globe Contributor September 7, 2018



The bronze dog statues in the parlor came from homeowner Donna Garlough's childhood home. She favors inexpensive furniture in classic silhouettes. "I don't want any rooms to be off-limits to kids," she says.

ALLISON SEPANEK

The backsplash in Donna Garlough's kitchen is temporary. Kind of. Garlough, style director at Wayfair's Joss & Main home furnishings site, isn't sure whether she wants to commit to it. She slapped up a small section of peel-and-stick tile two years ago to get a feel for the look and has yet to remove it. "You know how hairstylists give themselves wacky asymmetrical cuts or purple hair on a whim?" she asks. "That's how I am with my home, constantly experimenting."

In 2009, Garlough and her husband, Dave, founder of the wine curation company Upper Glass, purchased a Charlestown fixer-upper built in 1860 on land originally earmarked for the park surrounding the Bunker Hill Monument. The Second Empire Victorian stands on one of the neighborhood's most picturesque streets, but when they bought it, the house was decrepit. "There was cinder-block furniture, a million layers of linoleum, and spray-painted graffiti," Garlough says. "We just started scrubbing, one room at a time."

Nine years, two children — Sarah, 7, and Jonah, 5 — and two major renovations later, the home is a family-friendly showplace. The projects preserved and mimicked historic architectural elements while also updating for modern-day comfort. Garlough, who recently published *Your Home, Your Style: How to Find Your Look & Create Rooms You Love*, describes her approach as traditional with a hint of glamour. There are no guarantees about what may turn up. "This is a real living house that is constantly changing, shifting, settling," says Garlough. "I'm a tinkerer."



Though Joss & Main features eye-catching bright colors in its catalogs and showroom vignettes, customers tend to buy "safe" colors, such as gray, beige, and navy. Garlough herself follows the same pattern. "I work with color all day, so I prefer a fairly neutral palette at home," she says.

The parlor epitomizes Garlough's signature easy, elegant aesthetic. The original marble mantel and a gilded-wood mirror anchor the room, which, though small, accommodates a piano. The furnishings are another example of house as laboratory: Garlough mixes secondhand finds from the likes of Craigslist (the wing chair), eBay (a brass-and-crystal chandelier), and various Wayfair artifacts (the rug, chairs, and artwork), some purchased using the employee discount, others left behind from work-related photo shoots. "Co-workers joke that I have my own prop library," she says, "which leads to even more shoots."

The dining room is Garlough's solitary ode to saturated color, the result of a longstanding desire for a dramatic navy space. She loves the contrast between the wainscoting and walls, whose imperfections the dark hue masks. Garlough says navy is very easy to mix and match, and she uses it as an accent throughout the house. As in most rooms, a vintage Oriental rug graces the floor. The rugs, she points out, "bring so much soul and can really take a beating."

In 2013, an update of the master bath appropriated the closet from a bedroom that's now Dave's office in order to include a huge walk-in shower. The vibe is very Parisian hotel, with ample marble, double pedestal sinks, and a brass-and-crystal chandelier from the Brimfield Antique Show.

The master bedroom has a similar feel, all soothing neutrals, with another flea market-style chandelier (though this one is a new piece from Joss & Main) that hangs from the original plaster ceiling medallion. Garlough carried the gold tones into the hallway with a grid of gold-framed Rorschach-like DIY artworks made using her kids' Crayola paint. "Ink blot is the new botanical print," she quips.

The couple built a European-style dream kitchen in 2014. It boasts a professional range with a curvy custom hood, basalt floor tiles in a herringbone pattern, floor-to-ceiling cabinetry with seeded-glass panels, and a center island topped with honed Danby marble. "I considered Carrara and Calacatta, but Danby is harder and doesn't etch as easily," Garlough says.



Off the kitchen was a pantry that had once been a coat closet. She turned that into a spiffy powder room with blue-and-white marble-patterned wallpaper by Christian Lacroix, a glam gold-leaf pendant, and a teeny-tiny corner sink. "I was on a mad hunt for a sink that would fit before realizing I had to search 'hand rinse sink,'" Garlough says. "It unlocked the formula for the layout."

When they first moved in, a small tree was growing next to the washing machine in the dirt-floored basement. "I'd clip it, do the laundry, and repeat," says Garlough. The washer/dryer moved to the bathroom on the top floor in 2013, and in 2014, the couple excavated the basement and half the patio to create a full-height, livable garden level. In addition to a mudroom, there's a family room with sliders that open onto a new patio, rebuilt by Dave with bricks found in the alley. It's where the kids watch cartoons on Saturday mornings and the

couple listens to music in the evening, three floors away from the kids' bedrooms.

The patio is a haven, especially at this time of year. The family hosts an open patio party on Halloween, complete with string lights and grog. Garlough says, "These are the things that make the effort worthwhile, and living in the city magical."

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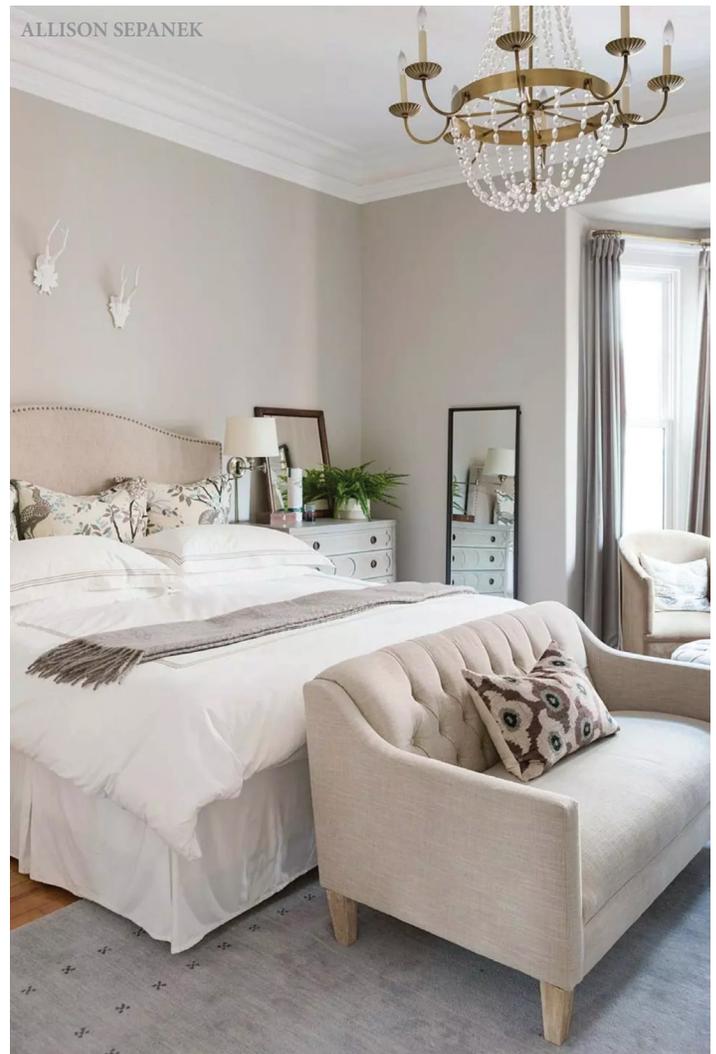
The transformation of the house began in the master bedroom, which the homeowners designated throughout the project as a sanctuary from the surrounding chaos. The small-scale settee is from Pottery Barn Kids.

RESOURCES

Interior Design: Donna Garlough, selfstyled.com

Contractor: Columbia Contracting Corp., columbiacon.com

Patio Design: Nilsen Landscape Design, nilsenlandscape.com



Inspired by wallpaper in her parents' California home, Garlough chose an abstract pattern for the powder room off the kitchen.